



Philadelphia Department of Public Health
Division of Disease Control

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Health Advisory
Heat-Related Morbidity and Mortality in Philadelphia
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As summer approaches, we need your help to prevent heat-related illness among your patients. Hot weather can cause heat stroke and exacerbate chronic medical conditions, and may lead to severe complications and death. Extreme heat kills more Americans each year on average than *all other natural disasters combined*.

During a heat wave, health care providers should:

- Monitor extreme weather alerts from the National Weather Service and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health.
- Advise high-risk patients to use an air conditioner or get to an air-conditioned place.
- Be alert to heat-related illness or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease.
- Engage family members or other support networks to check on at-risk patients frequently.

Individuals at greatest risk include:

- Persons over age 65
- Persons with chronic physical or mental health conditions
- Those taking certain medications
- Those living alone or with decreased mobility
- Pregnant women
- Small children
- Those who work in high heat environments
- Those engaged in strenuous physical activity

Signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke include:

- Dizziness or syncope
- Muscle cramps
- Dry, hot skin
- Nausea or vomiting
- Headache
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Impaired judgment
- Bizarre behavior or altered mental state
- Hallucinations
- Coma

Be sure to:

- Counsel your at-risk patients on the importance of staying cool during hot weather.
- Be alert to heat-related illness or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions.
- Advise at-risk patients to use their air conditioner or go to a place with air conditioning. To find a cooling center in Philadelphia, call the Heatline at **215-765-9040**, or visit **www.pcacares.org**.
- Engage family members or other support networks to frequently check on at-risk patients.
- Display or distribute the attached flyer in your patient waiting areas and to at-risk patients.

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Philadelphia Department of Public Health

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215-685-6740 (phone) • 215-686-4514 (after hours) • 215-545-8362 (fax) • www.phila.gov/health/ • hip.phila.gov



RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO AVOID HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

During hot weather, stay safe from the heat by following these tips:

Drink lots of fluids.

- Drink water throughout the day
- Avoid caffeinated drinks like soda, tea or alcohol (they can dehydrate you)

Stay cool outside.

- Avoid being outside during the hottest times of the day (10 a.m. - 2 p.m.)
- Try to rest in the shade and wear sunscreen, light clothing, hats and sunglasses to keep cool

Stay cool inside.

- Use a fan with the windows open or an air conditioner
- Visit places like the library, shopping centers, movie theaters or senior centers that have air conditioning

Watch out for others.

- Check on your neighbors and people you know who have medical problems
- Never leave seniors, children or pets alone in a car
- Be sure pets have plenty of cool water to drink, and are kept out of the sun



The early warning signs of heat stress are:

- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Faintness
- Light-headedness
- Nausea

If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms, go to a cool environment, drink liquids, remove excess clothing and rest.

Serious signs of heat stress include:

- Unconsciousness
- Rapid heartbeat
- Throbbing headache
- Dry skin
- Chest pain
- Irritability
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Muscle cramps
- Staggering
- Difficulty breathing

If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms, call 911. While waiting for help, move the person to a cool area, remove excess clothing, spray water and fan the person.

The City of Philadelphia operates several summer heat programs, including home visits by field teams, daytime outreach for the homeless, and the "Heatline." You can call the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging's "Heatline" at 215-765-9040.